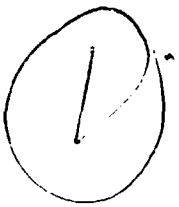

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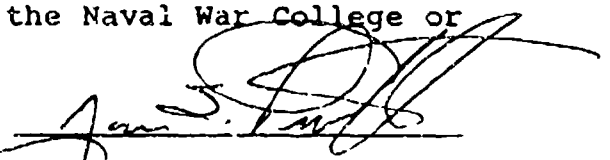
WHAT OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR LESSON CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE ALLIED INVASION OF SICILY?

by

JAMES E. PRESCOTT
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: 

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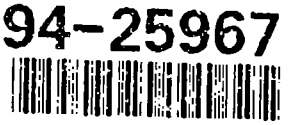

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This paper discusses the background heading to the decision to plan and execute Operation "Husky," the allied invasion of Sicily during World War II. Although chosen as the next step following North Africa by the Allies, the decision agreed to at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, was not at the time to be in line with American military opinion for what action was now appropriate for the Allies. American military leadership strongly favored a cross-channel invasion of Northwest Europe as soon as possible in order to defeat Germany and devote attention to the Pacific. However, the British position of an indirect, peripheral approach to wear down Germany prevailed and "Operation Husky" was born.

Husky was a massive undertaking, whose planning was packed with controversy, indecision and a lack of aggressiveness by the allied leadership. Upon execution, these problems manifested themselves further in poor coordination, lack of guidance, service jealousy and ineffective employment of an overwhelming force. The result was a brilliant holding action and withdrawal by the Axis forces on the island and a less decisive victory by the Allies that took 38 days to achieve.

Study of the problems experienced in carrying out Operation Husky are particularly relevant today to our United States military forces as we continue to foster and develop jointness as well as plan for multi-lateral operations involving combined employment of our resources with those of Allied nations.

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WHAT OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR LESSON CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE ALLIED INVASION OF SICILY?

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Following the Allied victories in North Africa in World War II, opinion among the Allies differed as to the next strategic steps to be taken. The Americans were still advocating the importance of a cross channel invasion of the Northwest European Continent and the need to concentrate large field armies against the Germans. Having agreed to a strategy of defeating Germany first, American planners were anxious to get the job done and turn their attention to the Pacific, where national emotions from Pearl Harbor ran high to defeat Japan. The Russians, were eager for the Allies to open a second front to relieve the pressure they were experiencing from Hitler's Eastern Front operations. The British, advocated a much more cautious approach and believed that the Allies should strike at the periphery of the Nazi empire to wear them down. By doing this, the Allies' cross channel invasion would be much more effective if postponed and Allied strength allowed to grow.

In January 1943, the Casablanca Conference proved to be a crucial meeting between Roosevelt, Churchill and their key advisors. Churchill strongly pushed that the next Allied step after Tunisia operations were completed, be to attack the Axis along the southern periphery in the Mediterranean.

Churchill saw America growing increasingly stronger in the war and viewed the Mediterranean as an opportunity to restore British preeminence in the war. The British had arrived at Casablanca with their internal differences settled and unified in their approach to the Americans.[1] The American delegation was small and by comparison woefully unprepared to face the organized British, a mistake they would never make again.[2] The Americans had not settled their differences beforehand, resulting in a weakened argument with the British. Amazingly, the American military chiefs had only one meeting with Roosevelt prior to the conference and were obviously less prepared for the conference than their British counterparts.[3] The result was that the British view prevailed through compromise and the decision to plan and implement Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily was made.

As military leaders, studying the Allied invasion of Sicily is important to us for the conduct of future multi-lateral operations, whereby we will be making operational level

of war decisions in concert with Allies who do not necessarily share our way of thinking, culture, military background and experience. The planning and conduct of Operation Husky resulted in a command structure that had General Dwight Eisenhower named as Allied Commander in Chief. However, all of Eisenhower's principle deputies were British. General Alexander was named Deputy Commander and Ground Force Commander, Admiral Cunningham was Naval Forces Command and Air Chief Marshal Tedder was in charge of all Allied Air Forces. Invasion forces consisted of two main task forces that would conduct amphibious landings on five beaches along the southern coast of Sicily. An eastern task force placed under the command of British General Montgomery included all British and Canadian air, ground and sea units. American Lieutenant General Patton was named Commander of the Western Task Force with all American sea, air and ground units under him.[4] The Allied command arrangements are shown at Appendix A. A map depicting the invasion is at Appendix B.

This paper will discuss some of the operational level of war lessons learned that we as military leaders should consider when conducting future operations. As the lessons learned from any military operation of the size and complexity of Operation Husky are numerous, this paper will concentrate on those that

appear to stand out as having major significance in this particular campaign.

Although Operation Husky ultimately achieved its objectives, the operation was a bitter victory for the Allies and reflected a dire need for better coordination during both planning and execution as well as the resolution of several shortcomings to ensure future battlefield success.

CHAPTER II

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

Several operational level of war lessons can be learned from an examination of the Allied Invasion of Sicily in July, 1943 that have direct implications on future combined and joint operations by the U.S. military. Although lessons learned from Operation Husky are varied and numerous, this paper will focus on the importance of close coordination and unity of effort between all elements of an operation (ground, sea and air) as well as the roles played by mass and surprise in this operation.

The mission of Operation Husky was to conquer the island of Sicily in order to achieve strategic objectives of freeing Mediterranean shipping from Axis harassment, diverting German strength from the Russian Front, and increasing the pressure on Italy to desert Hitler. In addition, it was also hoped that Messina, on Sicily's northeast coast, could be seized fast enough to seal off the third of a million Axis troops on the island before they could escape across the two-mile-wide straits to the mainland.[5] In order to achieve the operation's goals, the following <u>military conditions had to be produced</u> in the theater of operations:

- Control of the Sea;
- Control of the Air; and
- Quick Seizure of Port Facilities.

Control of the sea posed no problem as the Royal Navy reigned supreme in the Mediterranean. However, Control of the air would not be so easy as Sicily contained 30 airfields located in three groups. Seizure of these airfields was considered essential because Allied fighters would be operating at extreme range. Planners estimated that the Allies would need a port capacity of 6,000 tons per day to sustain its ground and air forces ashore.[6] The sequence of actions envisioned by Husky planners most likely to produce the above military conditions called for a dual assault, one on the western tip and one on the southern tip of the island. However, this original plan was strongly objected to by General Montgomery who claimed that to satisfy the logisticians and airmen the armies were to be landed beyond mutual supporting distance and would be dangerously weak, inviting defeat in detail.[7] As a result, Husky was altered to consist of a single strong assault on Sicily's southern tip. Montgomery's British Eighth Army was to land at Pachino and Avola and move northeast through Syracuse and the Cantina Plains to Messina. Patton's

United States Seventh Army was to land at Scoglitti, Gela and Licata and protect Montgomery's flank. Clearly, Montgomery and Alexander had secured in the planning of Husky that the British force was to play the role in the drive on Messina and the conquest of Sicily, and that the Americans were to be positioned in such a manner as to best aid the British thrust north by protecting the British flank and rear. Although there had been no prepared plan by 15th Army Group for the maneuver of the two armies after seizure of their initial assault objectives, the assault plan itself contained by implication the above general scheme that Alexander hoped to follow.[8] Alexander distrusted the Americans and was convinced that the Eighth Army was better qualified for the main task than the Seventh Army.[9]

Planning for Husky had been characterized by indecision, bickering, and parochialism of thought from the onset by the planners. Once underway, the operation suffered due to poor coordination and unity of effort between the armies and supporting elements as well as a lack of guidance and leadership from Alexander. Prior to and during the conduct of Operation Husky, the senior Allied Component Commanders operated from separate headquarters hundreds of miles apart with Eisenhower's approval. This fact contributed to several

problems and misunderstandings. For example, Allied naval ships were unaware of when Allied aircraft would be passing overhead and at night mistakenly shot down several Allied aircraft transporting paratroopers who were needed to secure airfields and cut Axis lines communication. In addition, despite overwhelming air power, close air support for the 7th and 8th Armies was nearly non-existent. The Air Component required requests for close air support to be submitted twelve hours in advance. Ground commanders operated with virtually no idea of when and where Allied air forces were to strike. Consequently, they had to do without air support for most of the campaign and were often subjected to Axis air attacks as the Allied air force failed to eliminate the enemy air threat. Fortunately, naval gunfire support was effective.

Husky called for airborne troops to play a key role in the seizure of several objectives such as airfields. However, bad weather, coupled with pilots totally inexperienced in either dropping paratroopers or towing gliders, resulted in many Allied soldiers missing their designated drop zones by several miles, while many perished in the sea. Pilots had become so confused due to the gusty winds and darkness that many headed back to Africa without completing their missions, or desperately searched for any land to drop their paratroopers.

Ground commanders within the two invading armies were unaware of what objectives the airborne elements supporting each army were supposed to secure.

As events began to unfold in Sicily, both Army commanders found themselves without a firm plan of action or guidance from Alexander. There existed no overall master plan of campaign, no agreed strategy (however loosely defined) for the conquest of Sicily. During the planning phase, Patton and Montgomery never met to discuss strategy and there was no coordination between their Army headquarters or from Alexander's 15th Army Group staff. Thus, among the three senior ground commanders there was not even a common agreement on campaign strategy.[10] As one of Montgomery's senior staff officers later wrote, "The two armies were left largely to develop their operations in the manner which seemed most propitious in the prevailing circumstances. When there is a master plan, the subordinates exercise their initiatives within its framework, and there is thus greater cohesion in seeking to achieve the superior commander's object."[11] In other words, what's the commander's intent and what's the plan to achieve that intent? As we would see again at Anzio, Alexander was woefully inept at providing clear, concise guidance to subordinate commanders.

The result of the lack of guidance by Alexander was inevitable. Patton and Montgomery, both strong-willed, began to act independently of Alexander and each other. In addition, Montgomery began to indirectly call the shots of the ground campaign as he repeatedly "suggested" to Alexander what should be done next. The result, was Alexander, who distrusted the Americans and failed to recognize their improvement and achievements, relegated the 7th Army to a supporting role in Sicily. His decision to change the boundary between the 7th and 8th Armies and turn over a highway controlled by the American's 45th Division to Montgomery, sparked a feud between the Americans and British that impeded their cooperation with each other for the remainder of the war. Alexander simply had a poor grip on the entire operation, and regardless of how well they performed, was not prepared to entrust 7th Army to any meaningful role early on in the campaign. It was only later when the 8th Army was stalled in their advance that Alexander permitted Patton to execute his plan to go north.

Although the Allies possessed overwhelming combat power (air, land and sea) in Operation Husky, Eisenhower and Alexander failed to apply the resources of the invasion force in a manner that capitalized on the massing of their forces. As previously mentioned in this paper, 7th Army was initially

relegated to a supporting role even though their successes placed them in an excellent position to thrust north. Failure by the Allies to effectively concentrate their two armies into a position to smash the Axis defenders, allowed the enemy to conduct a brilliant holding action and evacuation in 38 days. Had the Allies used the 7th and 8th Armies together in a combined offensive from the start, their overwhelming force could have resulted in a shorter and more decisive campaign.

Eisenhower and Alexander failed to accurately assess the risk to the invasion force by electing to only use 8th Army as the offensive punch against the Axis forces who made outstanding use of highly defensible terrain and correctly anticipated 8th Army's likely avenue of assault. The Allies' actions in Operation Husky allowed the Axis forces to recover from the initial shock of the attack and ultimately rally for counterattacks with inferior forces. The Allies lost the initiative by not using their armies together as a team and coordinating a combined offensive.

Operation Husky did achieve the element of surprise as the landing by both the 7th and 8th Armies met very light resistance and was virtually unopposed at night. The Allies had ensured that Hitler and his Italian Axis companions were the victims of a carefully laid deception plan.[12] Operation

Mincemeat was the name given to a fictitious plan to invade Greece, where Hitler and many of his high command advisors suspected the Allies would invade. The plan was outlined in documents in a briefcase chained to the wrist of a corpse that the Allies had washed ashore in Spain with the intent to deceive the Axis and aid the probability of achieving surprise. The plan worked, as the information ultimately convinced Hitler that Sicily was merely a diversion for Operation Mincemeat.[13] As a result, Hitler decided to send 13 divisions to the Balkans, vice six in Italy and Sicily combined.[14] The German commander on Sicily, Field Marshal Kesselring, suspected an eventual Allied attack on Sicily, but the locations and the timing of the landings (the morning after a strong mistral) took the Axis forces by surprise.[15]

The Allied invasion of Sicily was the largest amphibious landing operation to date in history. The fact that the Allies proceeded with the invasion in bad weather caused many paratroopers, gliders and landing vessels to miss their objectives. However, conducting the operation during and immediately following a period of severe weather enhanced the element of surprise. Apparently, the planners felt the risks to the force were worth taking at the time. Once Husky was underway, had the Allies's operations been more defined and

coordinated, the benefits from achieving surprise could have been better exploited. The exploitation of the ground offensive was ignored by Alexander who preferred to wait and see how the enemy reacted.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS

In Operation Husky, we can see that in order for a combat operation to be successful, a clearly defined mission and objectives for the forces must be laid out in advance, as well as a united effort put forth by all participants to achieve victory.

Operation Husky was an important victory for the Allies. However, the operational planners adopted a very conservative approach to the campaign that failed to use all available forces to their maximum capability to seek out and destroy the enemy. Consequently, they ultimately allowed the German forces to escape to the Italian mainland.

Operation Husky did achieve the important strategic objectives of causing Italy to drop out of the war, Hitler to reinforce Italy and Greece, and divert forces from the Russian Front, relieving pressure on Stalin, and ultimately helping to wear Germany down for the eventual cross-channel invasion in 1944 (Overlord).

Having studied Operation Husky, where should we as military professionals go from here? The answer lies in our continued efforts towards jointness in the conduct of U.S.

military operations. Husky showed us how an operation can become much less effective if all players in the effort are not committed to support each other with the united goal of victory. In Husky, the unwillingness of the Air Arm Commanders to permit any action that hinted of a loss of control to another service resulted in ineffective close air support. Allied air superiority was not exploited due to their inability to direct missions to meet immediate requirements resulting in untimely support of ground units engaged with the enemy.

It appears that the Allies failed to focus on the correct center of gravity during Operation Husky. Rather than conquering the island and taking Messina, the more appropriate focus should have been on the destruction of the enemy armed forces. The invasion plan allowed the enemy forces to conduct a phased withdrawal and use an avenue of escape across the straits of Messina. An Allied landing aimed closer to Messina or on the toe of mainland Italy, would have trapped the two German Divisions and the Italian 6th Army on the island with no escape route; As a result, the campaign may have been shorter, less costly, and more decisive.

The Allies were unable to interfere significantly with the German evacuation.[16] Bombing attempts by B-17 heavy bombers concentrated over the straits of Messina at night when

Eisenhower assumed the evacuation would occur. In fact, most boats crossed during the day under thick anti-aircraft protection that kept fighters and light bombers at a safe distance.[17] In addition, the Allied naval forces were unwilling to operate in the restricted waters of the straits, further allowing the Germans to conduct around-the-clock evacuation operations.

Operation Husky has shown us that our fighting forces require strong, effective leadership, sound doctrine and training, adequate equipment, and command relationships that result in bringing overwhelming force to bear in a coordinated manner. The lessons we can learn from how Operation Husky was conducted can help us become a more efficient fighting force in the future.

We can only speculate as to how much more could have been achieved by Operation Husky had the Allied leadership been more aggressive and skilled at employing the overwhelming resources of the force.

In addition, this operation demonstrated how important it is to have a responsible commander in charge directing the activities of <u>all</u> elements of the fighting force. Although designated as Commander-in-Chief, General Eisenhower was relegated to not much more than a committee chairman, as the

British deputy commanders all pursued their individual component agendas with little attention to how all the combat forces would integrate and coordinate their actions during the campaign. Fortunately, for the Allies, many of their shortcomings outlined in this paper were corrected or improved upon prior to Operation Overlord in June 1944. In retrospect, the Allies agreement with Churchill's desire to go to Italy after Africa may have precluded a debacle in northwest Europe. Had the Americans had their way and launched an invasion in 1943, when we obviously were weaker and had so much to learn in conducting invasions with our British Allies, the results may have been much different than as we know them today.

APPENDIX A[18]

ALLIED COMMAND STRUCTURE

Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ)
Commander-in-Chief, Allied Force North Africa

Commander: General Dwight D.Eisenhower

Deputy: General Sir Harold Alexander

Allied Ground Forces
General Sir Harold Alexander

- Eighth Army (Force 545) - General Bernard Montgomery

  -- 13th Corps - Lt Gen Miles Dempsey
     --- 5th Div
     --- 50th (Northumbrian) Div
     --- 1st Airborne Div

  -- 30th Corps - Lt Gen Oliver Leese
     --- 51st (Highland) Div
     --- 1st Canadian Div

  -- Reserves
     --- 46th Div (not used in Sicily)
     --- 78th Div

- 7th Army (Force 343) - Lt Gen George Patton

  -- II Corps - Lt Gen Omar Bradley
     --- 1st Inf Div
     --- 45th Inf Div
     --- 3rd Inf Div

  -- Reserves
     --- 2nd Armored Div
     --- 82nd Airborne Div
     --- 9th Inf Div

Allied Naval Forces

Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham

- Eastern Task Force - Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey
  - Force A - Supporting 5th and 50th Divs
  - Force B - Supporting 51st Div
  - Force V - Supporting 1st Canadian Div
  - Force K - Support Force

- Western Task Force - Vice Admiral H. Kent Hewitt
  - Joss Force (TF 86) - Supporting 3rd Inf Div
  - Dime Force (TF 81) - Supporting 1st Inf Div
  - Cent Force (TF 85) - Supporting 45th Inf Div

Allied Air Forces

Mediterranean Air Command

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur W. Tedder

- Northwest African Air Forces - Maj Gen Carl A. Spaatz
  - Northwest African Strategic Air Force - Maj Gen Doolittle
  - Northwest African Tactical A F - Air Marshal Coningham
  - Northwest African Coastal Air Force
  - Northwest African Troop Carrier Command
  - Northwest African Air Service Command
  - Northwest African Photo Recon Wing

- Malta Air Command (RAF) - Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Park

- Middle East Air Command (RAF) - Air Chief Marshal Douglas

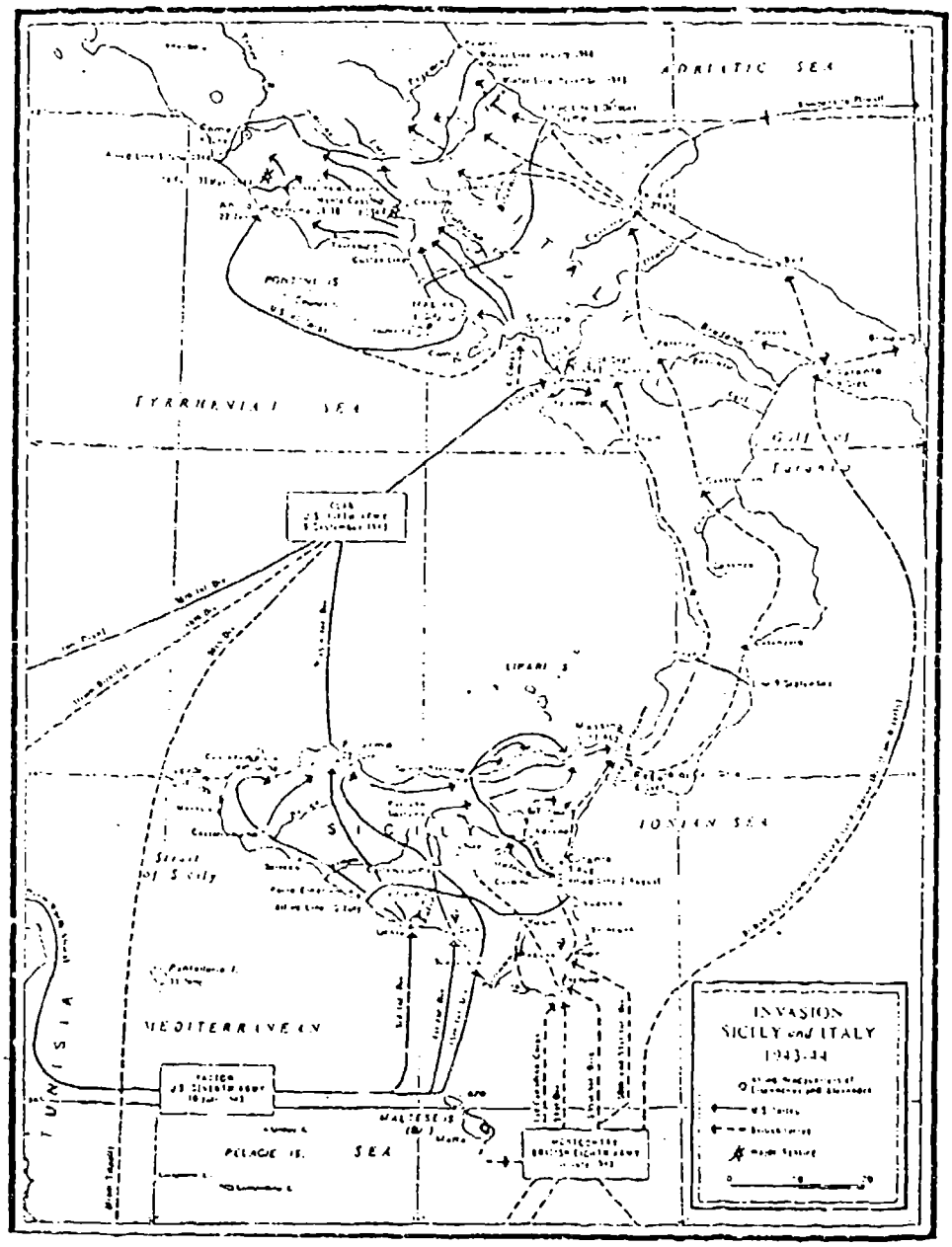
- Ninth U.S. Air Force - Maj Gen Brereton
  - Under operational control of Middle East Air Command

Task Force Commanders

	Eastern	Western
Ground	Gen Montgomery	Lt Gen Patton
Air CC	Air V Marshal Broadhurst	Col L. P. Hickey
Naval CC	Admiral Ramsey	Vice Adm Hewitt

APPENDIX B

MAP OF INVASION



Source: C. L. Sulzberger, The American Heritage Picture History of World War II, American Heritage Publishing Co., 1966.

NOTES

1. Carlo D'este, Bitter Victory: The Battle For Sicily, 1943, p.32.

2. Ibid., p.38.

3. Ibid., p.39.

4. Ibid., p.74.

5. C. L. Sulzberger, The American Heritage Picture History of World War II, p.375.

6. The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean, The West Point Military History Series, p.228.

7. Ibid., p.228.

8. Albert N. Garland and Howard M. Smith, United States Army in World War II, The Mediterranean Theatre of Operations, p.210.

9. Ibid., p.211.

10. D'este, Bitter Victory, p.321.

11. Ibid.

12. Samuel W. Mitchem, Jr. and Von Stauffenberg, The Battle of Sicily, p.29.

13. D'este, Bitter Victory, p.186.

14. Mitchem and Von Stauffenberg, The Battle of Sicily, p.26.

15. Sulzberger, The American Heritage Picture History of World War II, p.376.

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16. The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean, The West Point Military History Series, p.231.

17. Ibid.

18. D'este, Bitter Victory, pp.584-595.

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